DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 487 CS 217 283

AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
TITLE Assessing Student Achievement in Spelling.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Elementary Education; *Evaluation Methods; *Spelling; *Spelling Instruction; Student Educational Objectives; *Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS Spelling Growth

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes different approaches to assess learner achievement in the spelling curriculum. The following topics are discussed: assessment of spelling and the basal textbook, using spelling words for mastery based on research, individualized spelling, use of spelling words in context, standardized spelling tests, and the functional approach of teaching spelling as needed. The paper considers special spelling programs in software packages, such as drill and practice programs, tutorial programs, and gaming. The paper points out that a quality spelling program stresses worthwhile objectives for students to attain and that learning opportunities need to provide for individual differences and assist learners to achieve vital objectives in spelling. (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 447 487

Assessing Student Achievement in Spelling.

by Marlow Ediger

CS 217 283

M. Ediger

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ASSESSING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN SPELLING

How to teach spelling has long been a controversy. Along with the controversy is the problem of how to assess student achievement. For young learners, invented spelling versus the conventional means of spelling words has also made for a dilemma. This paper will analyze different approaches to assess learner achievement in the spelling curriculum.

Assessment of Spelling and the Basal Textbook

Basal spelling textbooks are still used to teach students to spell words correctly. Generally, these textbooks have a plan to use for each of the five days of the school week. On Monday, students receive an overview of the new words in the spelling list for learner mastery. Thus, the words are pronounced correctly and used in sentences by students with teacher assistance. A pretest is taken by learners to indicate which words have been spelled incorrectly and need studying for mastery. Students are also to complete the related exercises in the spelling text for Monday. Those words spelled correctly need not then be studied for correct spelling. On Tuesday, students are taught to use a method to use in spelling words correctly. The method may include looking at the new word correctly, saying the word correctly, listening to the sounds of the letters as the word is being pronounced, writing the new word one time, and check with the basal if correct spelling is in evidence. As this method is used, students practice writing each word. On Wednesday, a trial test is taken on the list of spelling words in the basal. Those spelling all words correctly may now study a bonus list to master in spelling. On Thursday, students practice the correct spelling of words missed on Wednesday. Friday is the day for a test on correct spelling of words from the basal for some students and the bonus words for others.

A new method of learning to spell words correctly needs to be adopted by those not doing well when using the previous methodology. Words to master in spelling are either spelled correctly or incorrectly. This makes assessment of spelling achievement an easy matter, except for the following:

1. what needs to be done if students spell words correctly from a list, but misspell those same words a short time later in functional writing?
2. how should students be assisted to spell words correctly who are unable to associate graphemes (symbols) with phonemes (sounds)?
3. how can students be motivated to perceive purpose in learning to spell words correctly?

The teacher has many things to assess in providing a quality spelling program for students (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Fifteen).

Using Spelling Words for Student Mastery Based on Research

Critics exist in using a spelling textbook for teaching students in learning to spell words correctly. A major criticism pertains to the relevance of spelling words contained in basal textbooks. Numerous research students have been made on which spelling words are most relevant and useful for student mastery. The author frequently receives requests from teachers for the Dolch list (Dolch, 1955). This list of 220 words were found to be the most frequently used words in spelling by students. Teachers requesting this listing find them useful in teaching spelling. Each teacher needs to ascertain the best method for having students master these 220 core words in spelling.

Critics in using a research based list, such as that of Dolch, indicate the following criticisms:

1. these lists soon become outdated since new words continually enter the scene which are salient for student mastery in spelling, such as words pertaining to computer technology and use.
2. each student may have different needs for words to master in spelling; a research list is based on the needs of a large numbers of learners.
3. little or no guidance is provided teachers on how to teach the correct spelling of research based word lists to students.

Individualized Spelling

In answer to the problem of "one size fits all" criticism, an individualized procedure of spelling instruction has merit. Thus, the number of spelling words a student misspells in daily written work becomes a source for a list of words for the learner to master. If leaner A misspells the following words in functional writing -- machine, cable, wiring, loading, computers, automation, among others -- then these words become the spelling curriculum for this individual student. The number of words on the individualized spelling list needs to be reasonable in number and not frustrate the learner beyond what he/she is able to master.

Problems in using individualized spelling include the following:

1. there are no suggested methods in having students learn to spell these words.
2. the teacher needs to have students learn to spell the misspelled words correctly as well as maintain learner interest in spelling.
3. much record keeping is involved in that the teacher needs to ascertain the number of words for each student to master within a certain time interval as well as keep record of each student's achievement in mastery learning (Ediger, 2000, 131-135).

Use of Spelling Words in Context

The acid test of student achievement in spelling pertains to the actual application of correct spelling of words in functional written products. Thus, students need to spell words correctly in written work such as the following:

1. business and friendly letters sent to a receiver of the written content.
2. invitations and announcements such as a birthday party.
3. essays, poems, and plays written for sharing with others.
4. diary entries written for personal values and for possible sharing.
5. note taking, outlining, and summarizing of subject matter for meaning and understanding.
6. legends, myths, fairy tales, tall tales, and fables written to enrich the self as well as for an audience.
7. personal achievement sent in school letters/notes to parents.
8. reports, logs, and committee deliberation summaries.
9. self evaluation information.
10. records kept of personal achievement in ongoing lessons and units of study.

In each of the above enumerated items, the product had a function and is not merely written for teachers to grade and return to the writer.

Within each of these written products, spelling achievement of the student may be noted, recorded, and then plans made for improved performance. Both the involved student and the teacher may keep a record of spelling performance. Correct spelling of words is emphasized in context. Within the classroom then, student achievement in spelling is being monitored and assessed (Ediger, 2000, 110-114).

Standardized Testing to Notice Student Achievement in Spelling

External to the classroom setting, standardized tests may be used to assess learner progress in spelling. These tests are based on norms and have been pilot tested to take out weaknesses of selected test items. The format of these tests tends to be multiple choice.Thus, a test taker may

1. select the correct spelling of a word from among four alternatives.
2. choose the correct spelling from four different words.
3. pick the correct spelling from within alternatives printed within a sentence.

From having taken the spelling subtest within a standardized achievement test, the student may receive results in terms of a

1. percentile
2. grade equivalent
3. standard deviation
4. quartile deviation
5. rank order.

Percentile results are the easiest to understand. For example, a student being on the sixtieth percentile from standardized spelling test results would have forty students being above and sixty below for every one hundred taking the same test. Weaknesses in using standardized tests to ascertain student achievement in spelling are the following:

1. test writers are external to the local classroom teaching/learning situation. They are rather far removed from students in the instructional arena.
2. test items are not in context and are unrelated to a functional writing task.
3. words chosen to be on the test may not be useful to numerous students.
4. spelling words should be functional to the student in everyday writing and not to the standardized test writers.
5. isolated test items tend to be unrelated to each other; rather knowledge and skills should be related to make for ease of use and retention (Ediger, 2000, 169-176).

Teach Spelling to Students as Needed

A truly functional approach in spelling instruction emphasizes assisting a student with spelling a word correctly as needed. Thus, for example, if a student is writing a friendly to be mailed, the teacher helps a student in spelling a word correctly as the writing activity progresses. Within the writing experience then, student may not know how to spell the word "tournament." The teacher provides assistance in several ways:

1. helping the learner associate a grapheme with a phoneme. There are several grapheme/phoneme consistencies in the word "tournament," such as the initial consonant "t."
2. guide the learner to perceive the ending syllable "ment" as being common to other words such as "parchment," "cement," "fulfillment," and ""apartment."
3. provide the correct spelling immediately if time is short which may be given to any student due to class size or other justifiable reasons.

Teaching spelling as needed has the following disadvantages:

1. there may not be an adequate amount of time to give the learner the needed help to become independent in spelling words correctly, such as phonics, syllabication, patterns in spelling, using sight methods when words are spelled non-phonetically, and developing a core of highly useful spelling words.
2. systematic instruction stressing appropriate scope and sequence is lacking.
3. rather immediate correct spelling of any word may need to be given so that the sequential thoughts of the writer continue to remain in operation (Ediger, 2000, 33-34).

Computer Use and the Spelling Curriculum

There are special spelling programs in software packages which might well assist students to learn to spell words correctly. Drill and practice programs assist students to practice correct spelling of words which were missed in tests or in functional writing. With diagnosis of spelling errors or pinpointing the kinds of errors made by students, there is a chance then to remediate or correct/what was missed. Tutorial programs present new words in a variety of ways for students to master in spelling. Gaming stresses students competing with others in spelling to win in the competition. Thus, each side responds to sequential words listed on the monitor in order to have his/her side win the spelling game. Most spelling games are challenging and interest students to develop proficiency and correctness.

A student in drill/practice, tutorial, and gaming sees one or more words on the monitor, responds to a multiple choice item as to which is spelled correctly. The learner sees immediate feedback on the monitor if he/she has spelled individual words correctly. Generally, programmed learning psychology is emphasized when soft ware packages are used in the spelling instructional arena. A student then sees the correct spelling of one or more words on the monitor. He/she then responds to a multiple choice item pertaining to what had been observed on the monitor. After responding, the learner sees the correct response and receives immediate feedback on spelling achievement. Assessment is given right away and the student knows how well he/she is doing in spelling and is ready for the next sequential programmed frame (Ediger, 2000, 19-21).

Assessment of Student Readiness to Learn to Spell Words

Each student needs to be ready to engage in studying the correct spelling of words. A checklist or rating scale may be used by the teacher to ascertain if a learner is ready to study the spelling of a given

set of words. First, students should be able to pronounce each word correctly before learning to spell these words. Thus, the teacher needs to assess if students, with practice, are able to identify words correctly within a specific learning activity. Second, students should have ample opportunities to look at these words to notice phonetic elements such as words starting alike or ending alike in terms of graphemes and phonemes. In sequence, learners should also compare vowel letters and sounds within/between spelling words in a lesson. Third, students should be able to use each word in a meaningful sentence. Meaning theory is vital in students learning to spell words correctly. Fourth, students should be stimulated to develop quality attitudes in wanting to spell words correctly. Good attitudes assist students to achieve more optimally in spelling words correctly. Fifth, students need to achieve skills in wanting to apply or use what has been learned (Ediger, 2000, 22-31).

A quality spelling program stresses worthwhile objectives for students to attain. Learning opportunities need to provide for individual differences and assist learners to achieve vital objectives in spelling. Continuous evaluation needs to be in the offing to provide information to students on how to achieve as optimally as possible.

References

Dolch, Edward (1955), Methods in Reading. Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 373-374.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), Teaching Reading Successfully. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publishing House, Chapter Fifteen.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Phonics and Poetry in the Classroom," Experiments in Education, 28 (8), 131-135.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "E-Mail Messages and Children's Literature," Experiments in Education, 28 (7), 110-114.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Measurement/Evaluation Courses in Teacher Education," Education, 121 (1), 169-176.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Reading Achievement in Science," Spectrum, 26 (1),33-34.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Assisting Students in Reading Science Subject Matter, Missouri Reader, 24 (2),19-21.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Portfolios and the Middle School Student, Michigan Middle School Journal, 24 (2), 22-31)